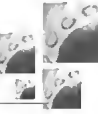




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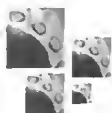
# MEASUREMENTS

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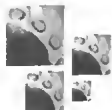
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GROTTO  
KAITLYN GLAZE



# LOVE LANGUAGE



# THINKING

RANDEE PORLTEUS

What do you see?  
When you look at that tree,  
I see you and me.  
I remember clearly  
every possibility  
thinking ... just maybe  
so close – only  
things last so briefly.  
I looked at you shyly  
as I leaned idly  
against that tree  
thinking “kiss me.”



# FEARING TOMORROW

SETH ARTHUR

I will lie awake fearing tomorrow.  
I always do.  
Rustling around in our bed.  
Flipping the pillow back and forth,  
to find the cooler side.  
I'll do anything to keep my mind off of it.  
Turn on the small clock radio next to the bed,  
just to hear someone's voice.  
Turn on your night reading lamp,  
that always kept me awake.  
Push the cat off of your side.  
Anything.  
Tomorrow used to mean hope.  
Excitement.  
A new day.  
And now it is just a reminder of what I've lost.  
I will lie awake fearing tomorrow,  
because you won't be there...again.





# OUTSIDE THE LINES

## CHARLES KERLIN

Your Paint By Number picture of Lassie and her Pups  
looks weird, fuzzy, smeared.

You've done the best you can so you  
put it in the laundry room,  
on the wall over the washing machine,  
hoping it will get damp and mildewy  
so you can throw it away.

But one night,  
prowling the bars,  
you find someone who really loves you.

She gets up the next morning,  
makes you breakfast  
and does his/her laundry.

She takes your Paint By Number picture  
of Lassie and her Pups

Down,

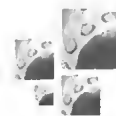
Dries it off,

and tells you it looks like a painting by Monet.

Then she puts it up over your bed  
which the two of you return to

as soon as you put  
your laundry away  
and clean out a drawer  
for her drawers.

Take that Mattell!



# FROM THE NEST

## MACIE LAKIN

A girl who never truly lived,  
one day decided she'd fly.  
She made wings of thin hopes  
and hastened prayers to keep her  
High Above.

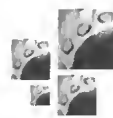
Looking down upon the cliff  
With the wings lashed to her back,  
She wondered if she'd fall.  
Closing her eyes, she didn't worry,  
Realizing that sometimes  
One has to make a blind leap of faith  
If they really want to live.



## RECOVERING PATRICK FISHER

I can't live my life falling in her arms  
I don't lov her anymore, but I won't do harm.  
Times change and seasons pass, but I'm still me  
I won't change just so she can be happy.  
Though the times were good, and she's not at fault,  
I can't help but feel that I gave her all.  
My love has run out and I'm on my way  
but I still think of her every day.  
She and I had something, something just great  
I can't help but feel that this news comes late.

Feelings still linger, but I'm moving on  
She clings to me and I feel put upon.  
I don't want to lose her, she's my best friend  
but, with regret, all things come to an end.  
I'll miss her, I'll miss her, dearly, I will.  
But all her requests count for but nil.  
She was my ev'rything, my closest mate;  
now her accusations are filled with hate.  
My dreams are plagued with her beautiful hair;  
our friendship is all I want to repair.



# BIG BROTHER

## RANDEE PORTEUS

“One more thing before you go.”

My brother paused in the doorway. I froze this moment in my head later: tall and lean, dressed in his fatigues, rucksack on his back, half-turned around in the fading light, and a question on his face. I could read him like a book. Of course I could, he was my brother, at one time my partner in crime and my confidant.

Now everything was different.

I made him stop and now I had to think of what to say. I was at a loss for words. Where could I even start? He did not like me or want me when my parents brought me home. He spent most of the next four years pinching me when my parents weren’t looking and making faces at me behind their backs.

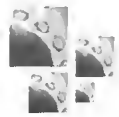
Something changed when he went to middle school. At the time in our lives when we should have grown apart, he and I grew closer. I was five. He was eleven. The age gap should have been a virtual canyon, a rift so big that we could never reach the other. But somehow, he and I became best friends. He helped me with homework and I charmed the girls he began bringing home. We got into trouble and kept secrets from mom and dad and even played pretend together.

He was a good brother.

We had our screaming fights, times when I would simply stand with my hands in my hair and screech at him while he swore at me. There were freeze-outs that lasted days. We wouldn’t talk to each other. We wouldn’t even look at each other. Somehow, though, we always made it past these and back into normalcy, like nothing had happened.

Pictures of the two of us lined the family room shelves: him teaching me how to fish, him reading *Where the Wild Things Are* to me, me showing him how to play a simple tune on the piano. He made it to every choir concert of mine and I was at every cross-country and track meet. When I got old enough (and fast enough to keep up) we ran together nearly every morning.

But then he began to mess up. Our good relationship ended after he graduated high school. He flunked out of college. His drinking became less recreational and I saw him twice while he was crashing from a mix of prescription drugs. He got a girl pregnant and then stood by, ignoring his Catholic upbringing, while she had an abortion. When he joined the army, I didn’t think much of it. I had been disappointed by him, had my heart broken too many times to believe in him now. My parents, who’d been there through everything, supported him. They were there for every graduation, helped him with every



move they could, and tried to convince me to spend some time with him. I refused, until my seventeenth birthday.

I opened the package from my brother carelessly. It would be something dumb, something that didn't matter. What I found, though, was a copy of *Where the Wild Things Are*. Taped inside the front cover were two pictures of the two of us: one of him, reading this very book to me and the other of the two of us at Halloween. I was Max and he was a Wild Thing. In the corner, he had scrawled: Miss you, Sissy. Have a happy seventeenth. I burst into tears, and later that summer visited my big brother for the first time since he'd left home. I found my brother truly changed. He was polite and respectful, loving and playful. He even had a girlfriend he was obviously crazy about. He was the man I'd always known my brother could be.

Now, I stood balanced on the edge of something. He was leaving now to go overseas, leaving our parents, leaving his now-fiancé, leaving me. I was scared that he would be hurt, that he would be killed, that he would come back but be so changed I would have lost my brother all over again. I was standing on my toes, leaning forward, almost in tears, and the words were caught in my throat.

My big brother.

I remembered his first day of sixth grade.

"Bubby!" I shrieked as he tried to walk out the door. He turned, annoyance on his baby-face, as my chubby little legs propelled me forward and I flung myself at his knees full force. With my arms around him, I looked up and grinned a sticky, little-girl grin. "I love you."

He looked down at me, and for a minute I thought he was going to brush me off, shove me away with a mutter. But he looked at me with a tenderness I'd never seen before, leaned down and kissed me on the top of my head and said, "Yeah, yeah. You too, Sissy."

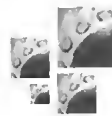
Now I did the same thing: I flung myself at him full force and buried my head in his chest. "I love you, Bubby." I squeezed my eyes shut, refusing to cry. I felt him press a kiss to the top of my head.

"Yeah, yeah. I love you, too, Sissy."

And then he was gone.

I didn't cry, not really. I stood on the porch after he had gone, watching the light fade over the grass and the sand and the ocean. I could hear my future sister-in-law wailing in the house. I hurt for her. A few tears escaped my iron will and ran down my cheeks. I wiped at them impatiently with the back of my hand.

"Thank you." The words caught me off guard. I turned and saw my mom standing in the doorway, watching me. I was about to ask her what she was thanking me for when she continued, "For crying when he left. I know we've all had a rough time. But you're still here, still standing next to him,



after all of it.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” I said. “He’s my big brother.”

“I know, Sissy.” My mom said, smiling. “I’ve always known.” She came up behind me and put her arms around me. We stood there, together, waiting and wondering as we watched the sun sink into the sea.

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I began to write letters.

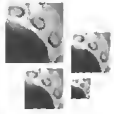
They were long and rambling and often didn’t make much sense. I wrote through the spring, through graduation, through the summer and into the fall, even through my transition from living at home to being a college freshman. Christmas came and went, and still I wrote. I sent pictures of home and college, of our parents and his fiancé, and I attempted to draw him scenes from our favorite book for his amusement. My drawing skills equaled those of a five-year-old, but I knew he’d appreciate my efforts.

Slowly, irregularly, letters would come back. My brother wrote to each of us individually. On my letters, along with my brother’s chicken-scratch handwriting, another unfamiliar script eventually appeared, interwoven with his. The handwriting was introduced to me as my brother’s best friend, fondly called “the baby” by all of the guys over there, for his youth. He was barely older than I was at the ripe old age of twenty. He and my brother hit it off immediately, because this boy reminded my brother so much of me.

The baby had been tossed from foster home to foster home since the age of eleven. When he had turned eighteen, joining the military had really been his only option. Young as he was, he made good impressions and worked hard, and he was well-liked by both his peers and his superiors. When my brother had first “introduced” him to me I had laughed out loud and written back that I was glad he had found me a potential husband. How corny was it? “Have a handsome marine write me a letter, please, brother.” It sounded like something from World War II. But I enjoyed the things that both my boys (as I began to think of them in my head) wrote to me.

Eventually summer rolled around and we found out my brother was coming home, safe and sound and in one piece. His fiancé was ecstatic, my parents were happy, and I couldn’t wait. My mom and I didn’t go to pick him up, figuring it would be better to just wait for him at the house, but my dad and my brother’s fiancé both went. When my dad pulled in the driveway, we were on the porch waiting. My mom got up from her chair and moved to the yard to greet my brother. I stayed where I was, lounging on the porch railing, one leg swinging lazily back and forth.

Four people got out of the car. But ... only my dad and my brother’s fiancé had gone to pick my



brother up. There should have been three people, not four. Who ...? I sat up, straining to see as they all unloaded luggage from the car. Finally the fourth person moved into view, and my breath caught for a second.

It was him – it had to be him. Who else would it be?

He was brown haired and blue eyed and when I somehow ended up standing next to him, he was barely taller than I was. “Hi.” I said.

He grinned. “Hi.”

Hearing his voice was odd, because for so long it had existed only in my head. That was all the talking we got to do. My brother swept me up into a hug, and then we were shoved into the house. As it turned out, he really had nowhere to go, so my brother had offered him a room in the house he shared with his fiancé.

He fit into our family well and got along just fine living with my brother and his fiancé. He had a job, paid rent, and mostly stayed out of their way. My brother’s fiancé joked once that living with him was like living with a ghost because she saw him so little. This could have been because he got up, went to work, and then spent most of his evenings with me.

He and I became fast friends. We had a lot in common, as my brother had pointed out. We spent our time talking in my backyard or going to the park and sitting on the swings for hours or just walking around my neighborhood. He told me about his life in foster care, his time in the military, what he had wanted to do with his life before, and what he still hoped to do with it now. I talked about myself, as well. Maybe more than I should have.

Soon enough, August came again and I started packing to go back to school. The night before I left, he and I sat in the bed of my truck. It was late and the stars were out and we had started at opposite ends of the truck but somehow drifted until we were sitting next to each other.

“Are you excited to go back to school?” He asked.

I shrugged, unsure of what to say, unsure of anything at all.

“Hey. Are you ok?”

I smiled and said, “Of course. I’m fine.”

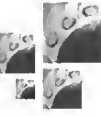
“Good.” He said. “I think I’m going to head home, though.”

“Oh, ok.”

“There’s just ... one more thing before you go.”

“What’s that?”

He leaned over and kissed me, soft and sweet. I smiled and he pulled back, starting to say something. But I closed the distance between us, not wanting the moment to end.

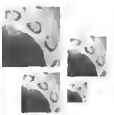


# A DIRECT ENCOUNTER WITH MY BOX CUTTER

## KATIE GUERNSEY

Life is a closed box.  
Have you found your box cutter?  
I have. I think.  
There he is,  
Sitting across from me,  
His eyes screaming for something new,  
Watching. Listening. Just like me.  
Robert Kinsendorf, an old family friend  
Boards the subway, hiding his face.  
He's headed to a seedy part of town,  
To meet his mistress,  
Far away from Park Avenue  
Where his wife might find out.  
This is my favorite thing to do,  
Just sit and watch people on the subway.  
I don't even have anywhere to go.  
Plus I like to come to see that boy with the screaming eyes.  
"The great mouse's ear of courage is gone."  
Whispers a woman two seats away.  
Another woman in all white Chanel  
Refuses to sit on the dirty seat.  
But the seat isn't dirty.  
It's just life.  
It's beautiful.  
If everything was clean  
Life would be boring.  
The woman in the Chanel pulls out her purse  
And gives the whispering woman a crisp green Benjamin.

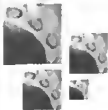




Ha. Yeah right.  
Sometimes I like to pretend.  
That'd never happen in real life.  
If she did though,  
She'd be guaranteed a spot behind  
Those pearly gates.  
Right?  
Wrong.  
That's the biggest load of crap  
I've ever heard.  
I look at him again, glancing nonchalantly.  
I taste fresh air as the doors open.  
A new crowd of people comes on,  
Some of the old crowd gets off.  
One day I'll be one of these people  
That always has something to do,  
Or somewhere to go.  
Maybe, but probably not.  
I look at him again.  
Awkward eye contact. Oops.  
Come on, Kate, be cool.  
"Hi there."  
Oh shit, it's him.  
"Hello."  
"I've noticed you," he says.  
I smile. Well this is awkward.  
"Ever feel like you're just a  
Jim Duggery in a Robert's world?" he asked.  
I thought about it. Maybe?  
"Kidding, that's what my Canadian friend  
Always says. Anyway, I've got to go.



See you around.”  
He left. I smiled.  
I would see him again.  
Tomorrow, I’d see him.  
We’d talk, we’d laugh,  
We’d get off at the same stop,  
And then we’d go have coffee,  
We’d talk for hours,  
And agree to go out Thursday night  
To some little place in Little Italy  
That no one else knows about,  
Until the class on their school trip comes in,  
And then we’ll go eat ice cream by the bridge.  
We will.  
My box is open.



## COWARD MIKE SOSNOWSKI

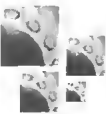
A Hollywood tale of boy meets girl.  
A nerd pining for the cheerleader  
I was lost in magnitude of smart, pretty, artsy  
and what seemed to me to be perfection.  
I was pretty sure that if I asked, I could make her mine.  
I could have reshaped my entire life, but I never asked.  
I was too afraid.



# CONCRETE POEM

## RANDEE PORTEUS

I wait for you  
underneath this damn tree.  
Wait for you, just like I always do.  
Just like I always have.  
When will  
you  
wait  
for  
me  
too?

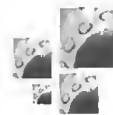


# THE ELEPHANT GIRL

## CHARLES KERLIN

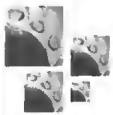
He claimed he ran the circus  
And he had on some kind of getup  
With a bow tie and suspenders,  
And black leather-looking pants,  
But his shoes were unshined  
And when I first saw him  
He was scooping shit  
Out of the elephant's boxcar.  
He had a pint of whiskey  
And he gave me a drink, then later  
Lots more,  
And you know what happened next.  
When the elephants began rumbling around  
The next morning,  
I woke up in the same shitty boxcar  
And he was up pitchforking hay to them.  
He said he'd be back later in the summer  
And then he ditched me there.

I went back home to my mother's room  
Where she was sleeping one off,  
Then hopped a train that night,  
And found the circus in Cleveland,  
And now I'm the new elephant girl  
I get to ride them around the Big Top.  
He has to stand outside on a high stool,  
Wearing his bow tie and suspenders,  
His leather-looking pants  
And his unshined shoes,



Chanting into a megaphone,  
“Hurry, hurry, hurry.  
Get your tickets here,  
Inside you’ll see the elephants and the elephant girl.  
Inside you’ll see everything you cain’t see here,  
A nickel or a dime, fifteen cents for overtime.”  
Hurry, hurry, hurry,  
The show’s about to begin.”

When the crowd tops out,  
The clowns  
Race around the center ring,  
Chasing each other,  
Hiding in barrels,  
And jumping up into the riggings.  
They all stop  
When the ringmaster  
Enters from the back.  
He cracks a long black whip  
To get the kids quieted down.  
He wears a black stovepipe hat  
Like Abraham Lincoln wore  
In a picture I saw in school.  
He has a long flowing scarf  
Around his neck  
And thigh-high real  
Black leather boots on  
And he starts the show  
Calling the elephants in.  
I’m on the first elephant,  
Cause’ I’m the elephant girl  
In a skintight, skin colored gown,

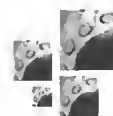


My naked legs wrapped  
Around the elephant's head in a way that  
Makes the yokels think they can see more of me  
Than they really can.  
The elephant man's back  
Cleaning shit out of their boxcar  
Getting them ready to leave that night  
For another town.  
He rides there.

I ride up front with the ringmaster  
And his girlfriend, who strips in the freak tent  
Before the real show begins.  
Well, she used to be his girlfriend.  
Hurry, hurry, hurry.  
The shows about to begin.

## OVER-USED SAMANTHA SCHROEDER

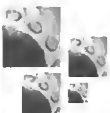
They cheat, they steal, they're bad,  
all boys are the same.  
They're loose, mean, two-faced,  
all girls are the same.  
Misconceptions brought on  
by ignorance hurt feelings.  
When in reality no one will admit  
that they have shitty taste in men and women.



## HER NAME WAS ANGELA NICOLE THOMSEN

All it takes to be a good skank is a good bra.  
Take it from Angela she would know.  
She doesn't get the cheap ones from Kohls or JC Penny.  
She got a real one,  
a Victoria's Secret one,  
she got neon,  
she got lace.  
Then she puts on a tight shirt,  
something sheer and low as well,  
and then she shows off that bra;  
it was expensive after all.  
The boys will come running;  
she'll say she's not looking for anything,  
and of course they'll want her.  
Tomorrow she wakes,  
and all she'll have left is some flashy bra,  
fallen under a stranger's bed,  
and a brand new rep.





# SCARS

## RANDEE PORTTEUS

Secretly, she collects scars. No one knows.

She gets up in the morning, and she has fifteen minutes to herself. Fifteen minutes to wipe the dreams out of her mind and force herself back to reality. Fifteen minutes to compose herself and make sure her face isn't swollen from crying. Fifteen minutes to put on the mask that she wears for everyone. Fifteen minutes is all the time she allows herself.

Sparrow opens her eyes, and her heart aches. She closes them, trying to force herself back into dreamland, where she was happy, where nothing matters. But she knows that she has to get up, that she has to function. So her feet hit the floor, and she stands. She is already coaching herself like she has been taught: you can do this, you are strong enough for this, just get through the day, the morning, the next five minutes. She makes it to the bathroom and splashes cold water on her face, thankful that her eyes are not puffy. She does not want to greet her new foster family with a tear-stained face her first morning here. They might think something is wrong. Hah.

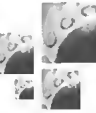
Sparrow struggles through her morning routine. The dull ache she felt when she woke had grown into something more. It's a sharp pain now. It hurts every time she breathes. She realizes that all she wants is to curl back up in a ball in bed. She squeezes her eyes tight shut, knowing that the tears are coming. No. She knows that today will be hard. There is no way she can put on an act for her new family while she hurts so much. She needs something to get through it.

She has used many things before, whatever was at her fingertips when she needed it. Broken pieces of glass, razor blades, the metal lid of a can with a jagged edge. She pulls a pair of scissors out of a duffel bag in the corner and strips off her long-sleeved shirt, holding out her arm and examining it.

The scratches extend from near her shoulder to mid-bicep. Some are scars, others are fresh and bloody, the skin around them inflamed and rather sick-looking if she stopped and thought about it. But she doesn't. She never does. She puts the blade against her skin and drags the sharp edge across her arm. It only stings, because she is always tentative at first. She goes back over the cut, pushing the blade deeper, gritting her teeth, feeling the pain for real now. It is exactly what she needs.

She cuts again. And again. And then again.

Finally she is done. She grabs a tissue and presses it to the marks on her arm, then digs through her drawer to find bandages. She carefully places them over the fresh cuts, knowing when she pulls them off they will take some of the scabs off the other, older cuts. She doesn't care. She hides the tissue and the bandage wrappers in her drawer. They'll get thrown away later.



Sparrow looks in the mirror and studies her reflection. Normal. Pretty. Nice. She smiles. Her heart is breaking. She opens her door, thankful for a second time that morning because she has her own room here. That makes things easier. She goes downstairs. In the kitchen, her foster family sits around the table. “Good morning, Sparrow.” Her foster mother says, smiling at her. The woman is pretty: blonde, thin, June Cleaver-esque. Her husband is at work, but her two young kids sit with her, sloppily eating oatmeal. They are around the age of eight. She smiles, sure that this woman will believe the lies she is about to spew. “Good morning. How are you?”

Her foster mother buys it. A part of Sparrow cries out in triumph because her carefully perfected façade has succeeded again. Another part of her cries out in pain and hurt and despair. It says notice me, help me, please. But she quiets that voice. She has been told countless times that it is okay to ask for help, but she never does. She does not need anyone.

No. She does not need anyone.

She is fine, just her and her collection of scars.

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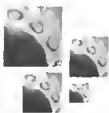
The scars begin above her right eyebrow. Half an inch long and pale, barely noticeable, this was her first scar, acquired at the age of five. Her head was no match for the corner of the sandbox, and she remembered her father, her real father, cradling her in his arms and carrying her into the emergency room. She remembered the red lights of the EMERGENCY sign – red was her favorite color.

On her right knee is a messy, ugly clump of scars. Nine years old, she was playing basketball with a group of rowdy boys in a shady area of town. Her sneakers could handle the broken glass in the corner of the court, but her knee could not. She spent an hour on the ground, carefully pulling shards of glass out of the bloody cuts.

The palm of her hand told another story. She was eleven when an older boy tried to take advantage of her in the back room of a dingy house where she was hanging out with her friends. She got away by grabbing the blade of his knife and kneeling him where it hurt the most. The blood poured from her hand all the way home.

A deep, long scar mars the skin of her left wrist, distorting the delicate map of veins there. She put this one there herself when she was fourteen, on a night when she knew only darkness and felt only pain. She took one too many slaps, one too many “you’re useless”-es from careless foster parents. She sobbed, feeling like her body was going to break. She knew without a doubt what she wanted. She made the cut, and was watching the life drain out of her when her foster parents returned too early. She remembered seeing the red EMERGENCY lights that time, too.

When she was released to a new foster home, she was treated like glass by the incredibly reli-



gious family she lived with. They were afraid to be near her, but afraid to let her be alone. Her bedroom did not have a door, and she wasn't allowed to use a razor to shave.

She was in the kitchen one day, helping cook. Her foster handed her a can opener and a can of beans. Sparrow opened the can and carelessly grabbed the lid, which bit into her thumb. "Ouch!" she exclaimed, staring at the cut she had made, watching the blood well up and run down her thumb. It was red, like the EMERGENCY signs.

"Oh, dear." Her foster mother said, grabbing a napkin and pressing it to the cut. "I'll get you a bandage." She hustled out of the room. Sparrow stared at the cut, at the blood, and wondered at the sting of it, how it hurt.

She got her bandage and continued to help. But her mind was elsewhere, the idea already forming there. She turned a little too carelessly and knocked a glass mixing bowl off the counter. It shattered into pieces. "Oh!" Sparrow said, crouching to begin sweeping the glass into a pile. Her foster mother sighed, "That's all right, I'll go get the dust pan." Once she was out of the room, Sparrow slipped a piece of glass into her pocket.

That night was the first time she cut.

On her upper left arm is a criss-crossed map of scars. She put them there herself with anything sharp she could find. They mirror the scars inside her.

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The scars inside her – they are worse.

Her father and mother were happy. A beautiful, young couple with an adorable daughter and the blessing of another on the way. Sparrow loved to put her hands on her mother's belly and feel the baby move. She had entire whispered conversations with the baby. She was seven. She thought that they would all have the perfect life together, the four of them.

It turned out differently.

The car accident was not something any of them planned on. Her father died – bled to death at the scene. Sparrow distinctly remembers him lying in a pool of his own blood, paramedics bent over him, trying to save his life. But he was gone.

Her mother tried to put their lives back together. She couldn't, though. She might have been able to pull through, she might have been able to make a good life for her and her children – but then she lost the baby.

She locked herself in her room for days at a time.



Every night, Sparrow crouched outside her mother's door, her knees hugged tight against her chest, listening to her mother sob, her own tears running silently down her cheeks. After one of these nights, Sparrow knocked like she always did. "Mom?" She called, tentative. No answer, as usual. She tried the door. It was unlocked. That was odd.

Sparrow opened the door and entered the room quietly. Her mother was lying in bed. "Mom?" Still no answer. Sparrow moved so that she could see her mother's face.

Her eyes were open but unseeing. She wasn't breathing.

Sparrow started screaming. Part of her still is.

The next few days moved by in a blur that Sparrow didn't really understand. There was one thing she understood, though. Her mother had left her, willingly. She didn't care enough about her to even stay alive.

That is truly the worst scar she carries.

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The act continues. Sparrow lies to her "family" every day. She smiles, while she screams on the inside. She makes nice at school, while she cuts in the bathroom. She laughs, while she cries herself to sleep. She gets through every day while her heart keeps breaking.

She makes it five months. Her foster mother notices the lattice of scars on her arms when she comes into Sparrow's room one night. After much discussion, they decide she will be better off in another foster home.

Of course.

The cuts are deep that night.

Sparrow does not particularly like her foster family. She has never liked any of her foster homes that much, though some were better than others. Still, the rejection hurts. The not being wanted hurts. Everything hurts.

She just wants to stop hurting.



# MY INNER-MOST SELF

## SETH ARTHUR

Did you notice that I hide behind my deep blue eyes?  
Hide the pain and the feelings, the deep rooted lies.  
The problems, the concerns, the soulful cries.

Did you notice that I wear a mask upon my face?  
Blocking all of my emotions and leaving no trace.  
Smothering my expressions under its leather and lace.

You think you know, but you don't understand.  
I'll smile, I'll wink, I'll wave my hand.  
I'll embrace you and hold you like no other man.

I'll tell you I love you and that I care so.  
Let you feel my heart beat and enter my soul.  
Tell you what you want and disregard what I know.

But beneath the skin is a bitter, dark mess.  
A tangled knot of insecurity underneath my chest.  
Always hoping for more, always settling for less.

But this is something that I won't let you see.  
It's the true, depressing, dark inner me.



KLONDIKE MIDDLE SCHOOL,  
FRIDAY THE 13TH OF SOME PARTICULAR YEAR  
SAMANTHA HARKNESS

Spring, may have been fall, my recollection is not clear.  
My name was called over the intercom, something that never happened:  
“Samantha Harkness to the principal's office please.”  
Everyone stared as I tried my best to breeze out the door.  
I caught a glimpse of my mother chatting with the secretary.  
She was holding an envelope as though it were the last thing she would ever hold  
in her hands.  
She was crying, but smiling.  
She handed me the papers, and as I read to myself, she exclaimed:  
“99.997% positive!” and she held onto me, as though I were the last thing she  
would ever hold in her hands.  
“Congratulations Miss Harkness,”  
I thought to myself, “you have a darling brand new father.”  
That was the day that marked my paternal legitimacy.  
I was no longer the bastard I thought him to be.



# JUSTIN WEST, SIDE STAIRS

10:00 PM, AUGUST 31, 2010

KRISTINA HEMMERLING

It's been seven days since we met  
And now we're sitting on the stairs  
Talking about all these big ideas:  
Religion, the stars, the universe,  
I wonder how far this conversation will go?  
I don't even know how long we've been sitting here,  
But I don't think I want it to end.  
Earlier today we were sitting on my bed  
Now we're on the stairs.  
"So, you know what Jennifer said earlier?"  
Of course I remember what she said,  
"Tell your boyfriend to shut up."  
He wasn't my boyfriend when she said that,  
But I wanted him to be.  
Now he was bringing it up.  
Finally we're to the part I want.  
"Yeah."  
"Well, I don't know if you want to, but I mean  
I do if you want to."  
I suddenly couldn't stop smiling.  
Maybe he didn't ask in some romantic way,  
But in his own way he just asked me to be his girlfriend.  
I can't stop smiling.  
"Yeah, of course I do."



# SHIVERS

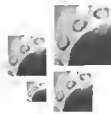




# HE WHO FIGHTS MONSTERS

## PATRICK FISHER

My ends, they are justified,  
But they pale to all my means  
A man who resorts to lies  
Isn't the worst that I have seen.  
I try my best to be he  
That is everything that you want.  
To make you smile with glee  
But I roam these halls as a haunt.  
I cross all the boundaries  
I do what I can to survive.  
I do not try to appease  
I only keep you all alive  
I am he who fights monsters,  
I do not offer compromise.  
I deny any censure;  
I will fall so you all can rise.  
Everything that I am:  
I am a one-man sacrifice.  
Leave my honor as a man  
Because, to me, good is not nice.  
I despise all sense of peace  
For my enemy deserves none.  
To his fate I hold the keys  
'fore I lock the door, he should run.  
Never again will I sleep  
for wicked things that I have done.  
I'm shepherd to all my sheep  
But now a wolf I have become.  
I stand now, blind and broken



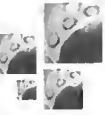
But I will keep my vigilance.  
My fury has awoken  
Love is put to death by no chance.  
Damn all those who say I should stay  
I am a relic of past times.  
I have held evil at bay  
But now I don't recognize mine.  
So here I am, I will not lie  
I am he who deserves to die.  
I sleep, I have served my purpose  
And I suffer no sense of loss.  
Put me down like the dog I am  
For I am no longer a man.  
I was warden to you, the lost,  
And my soul was all that it cost.



# THE LAST LAUGH

## PATRICK FISHER

This world's seen the worst and that's just a fact  
All a waking dream, like an insomniac.  
I will not speak long, your attention fades  
but finish this lament to world in hate.  
Can't find a sane man, searching up and down.  
Sometimes born, but they're made out to be clowns.  
They laugh in the face of those around them;  
on the inside, it's just to hide the shame.  
They hate themselves for being different.  
Facing no change, all they can do is vent.  
Laugh, clown, laugh in the face of all you hate  
though they ridicule, laugh and celebrate.  
It's hard, but just try, to find joy through pain.  
Do all you can to stay in the right lane.  
They are better, but they don't put on airs  
because they all know the last laugh is theirs.



# THE MONSTER

## PATRICK FISHER

You cry out, waiting to be saved  
from the hands of a most daring knave.  
It would definitely take one brave  
to traverse that deadly cave.

But you will find your calls not echoed  
because there's something that you don't know.  
The ones that you designate as hero  
have been slain by their most vicious foe.

I assure you they died in horrid pain  
and all their loss fed into my gain;  
for long have I still-lain  
'til the time best suited to make their blood rain.

This is not my victory, it is my conquest  
When I destroy all I see, I'll reach my final rest.  
You should have slain me when I offered you my blood,  
now it's pure ecstasy to crush your lives to mud.

# A WALK IN THE DARK

IAN J. EVANS

A sudden scratching  
I turn suddenly, in fright  
As leaves scratch cement

# RUNNING LIKE THE WIND

ERIC KESSLER

I run my hardest,  
the pain burning like fire.  
I fight for the end.



DISCRIMINATION  
KELSEY REYNOLDS



TALK TO THE HAND  
KELSEY REYNOLDS



ARTIFICIAL BEAUTY  
KELSEY REYNOLDS





ELEPHANT  
JOEL ARREGUIN



PORTRAIT OF LUCIFER  
JOEL ARREGUIN



DANDELION  
KELSEY REYNOLDS



ILLUMINATED PARIS  
J.C. RODRIGUEZ



NATURAL  
KELSEY REYNOLDS

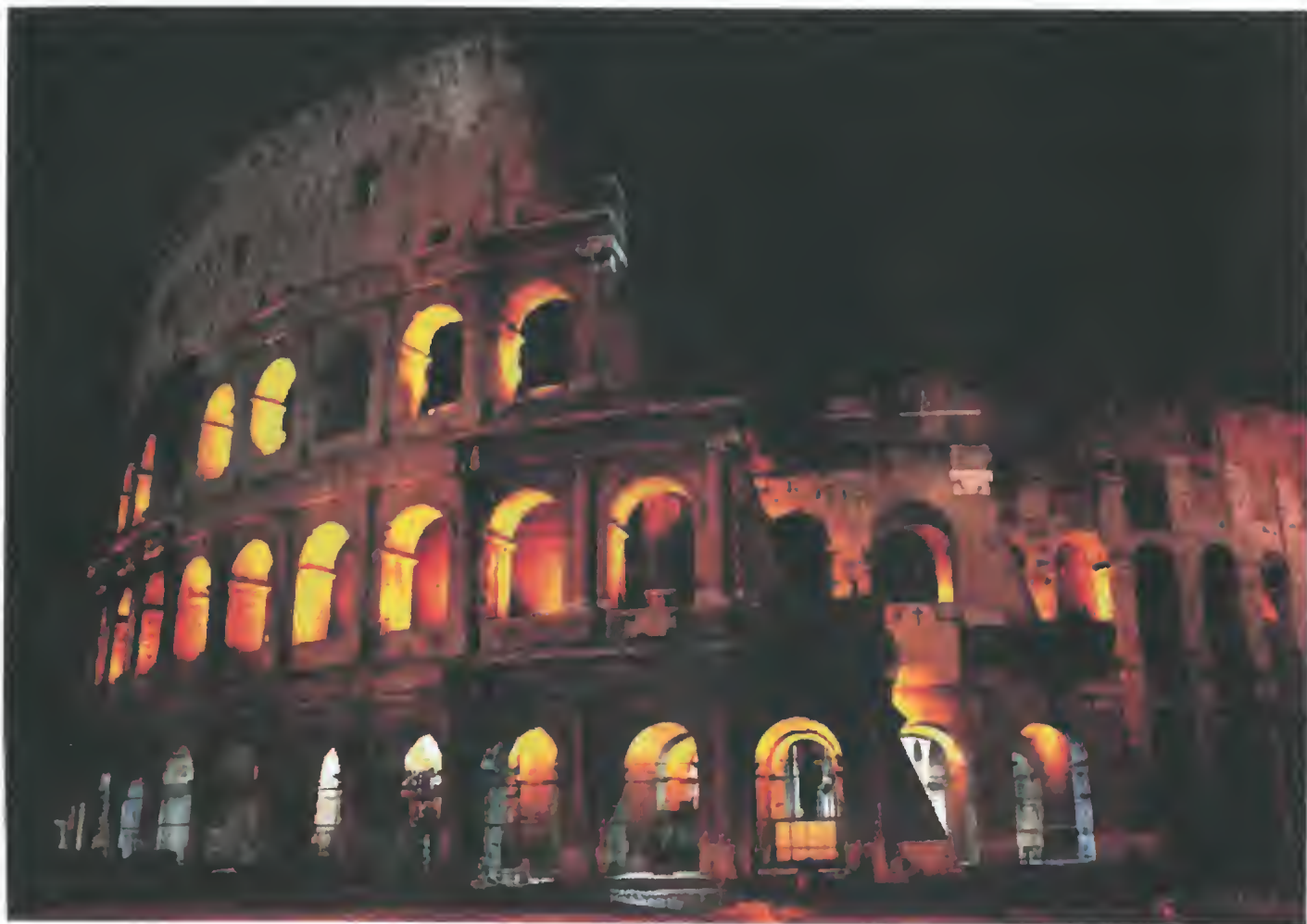




HOMAGE TO LIFE ON THE FARM [DETAIL INSET]  
BONNIE ZIMMER



CAPE INSTALLATION  
BONNIE ZIMMER

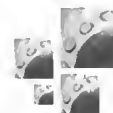


ROMAN COLOSSEUM  
JC RODRIGUEZ





AN EVENING ON EUROPA  
FRANK GONZALEZ



# KILLER

## JESSICA RUSCHKE

He turned on the kitchen faucet and tried to wash the blood off his knife, but it would not come off. He scrubbed it harder, almost cutting himself. While he scrubbed, the blood mingled with the water and slid down the drain, but whenever he stopped, the crimson stain glistened again on the wet knife as if he had not even tried to wash it.

The minutes ticked by, and Robert panicked. This had never happened before. Soap didn't even help. He took the knife into the backyard and buried it under a rose bush. Puzzled and uneasy, Robert went back to dispose of the body.

The woman's body lay on the bed. As he wrapped her in a sheet, he felt a vague sense of regret for this one. She'd been young, only nineteen. He'd found her on a large college campus.

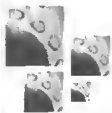
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He chose the spot months in advance. Robert went through the familiar motions of finding an apartment, a part-time job, and a fake id. He rehearsed his story, constantly asking himself new questions until he was sure he knew everything about his fake identity.

The morning before he left, Robert took one last look in the mirror, gloating over the youthfulness of his features. Though twenty-six, he easily passed for twenty-one. No one ever doubted him when he claimed to be transfer student.

'How could anyone not trust me?' Robert thought. His dark brown hair and eyes looked as handsome as ever, and his smile, deceptively open and sincere, showing gleaming white teeth. The overall effect was charming. Topped off with jeans and light blue shirt, he knew he'd attract any woman he went after. Chuckling, Robert climbed into his car and headed for the campus.

People swarmed around Robert as he scouted the area. Backpacks jostled him and two guys on bikes flew by on either side of him, but he barely noticed. He watched for more interesting prey. After observing the area for twenty minutes he saw her sitting on a bench near the Chemistry building. Her dark hair blew in the breeze. Her long, tan legs were crossed and the left one bounced up and down to the beat of whatever music she listened to through her iPod. Her turquoise shirt suited her well, and its cut showed off her curvy figure. She held a heavy textbook on her lap and a highlighter in her right hand, but didn't appear to be studying. Robert circled the area five times before approaching her. He ran



over his story, his excuse for stopping, and the multiple ways he could move the situation from there.

"Excuse me, sorry to bother you, but do you have the time?"

"What?" The girl took off her ear buds.

"What time is it, do you know? My watch stopped."

"It's quarter to one." She slid her cell phone back in her pocket.

"Thanks. I guess I'm late for my meeting after all. I'm a new transfer student here, and I think I'm lost. Can you point me to the Chemistry Building?" He noticed she held a Chemistry textbook, and knew the Chemistry building was right behind them.

"You're not as lost as you think. It's right behind you. I actually have class there in twenty minutes."

"Thanks. You've been a great help. My name's Sam, by the way. What's yours?"

"Amy."

She looked up at him and he noticed her gray eyes. He imagined how they would look widened in fear.

"Nice to meet you, Amy. Well, I should get going. I'm already late. Maybe I'll see you around."

"Maybe." Robert looked at her pretty face and vowed that "maybe" would be a "yes".

Robert contrived meetings over the next few days. They met in the dining hall, at a concert, at a party. Before the week was over, he secured a pizza date. He played the part of the charming college student, one of his favorites, for over a month. Once Amy believed the two of them were in a serious relationship, Robert asked her to go on an outing.

Amy met Robert in front of his apartment one sunny Saturday. From the way she dressed in red high heels, a denim mini skirt, and a red top, Robert decided she was expecting a momentous occasion. She talked the entire way there. Something about Robert always made people willing to tell their secrets. He knew all about her family life, her problems with her roommate, her classes, her career aspirations. That day she talked about the reasons she wanted to be a nurse.

"Sam, it isn't just that it's a hot career right now. I want to help people. Med school would take too long, and nurses are important too. Don't you think so, Sam? I hope I can work in a maternity ward some time. I love babies." Amy looked up at Robert. He loved seeing the trust and gentleness in her eyes. It gave him power. She covered his right hand, the one that clutched the stick shift. Something about her touched something deep inside him, but he pushed the feeling away.

"I think nurses have an especially important career. You will be a wonderful nurse." "Or you would, if you weren't going to die."

She smiled up at him. "What a great pair, right? A nurse and a pharmacist" Her hand moved up



and down his arm before again resting on his hand.

Robert imagined her grasping, struggling to break away from him. He reveled in his power. He no longer needed to push the feeling away. It disappeared. "We do make a good pair. As for the future, one can always hope."

"I don't see why either of us would be unable to achieve our dreams."

Robert smiled, and moved the conversation to other topics while he reviewed his plan for the weekend. Amy's last weekend.

When they arrived at the house, her chatter stopped. They sat in the garage for a moment. She spoke first "Where are we?"

"My home."

"You should have told me you were taking me to your home. I guess I'm meeting your parents?"

"I didn't say you were meeting my parents. I said we were at my home."

"Okay..." Though puzzled, she got out of the car. Robert wanted to grab her and run with her straight to his kill spot, but he knew from experience that he would enjoy it more if he played with her for awhile.

"What are we going to do?" Amy asked.

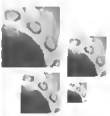
"First, I'm going to make you dinner. Second, we're going to eat it, with a little wine. Third, we are going to watch a movie. After that, who knows?" He smiled. She took his hand and let him lead her to the kitchen.

After a dinner of Chicken Parmesan, pasta, and red wine, the two of them settled down on the couch together to watch a movie. He spent the time watching Amy, reveling in the feel of her body leaning against his. Robert planned how to get her to the bedroom as he stroked her hair and rested his other hand on her arm. He always killed on his bed. When he slept, he liked to remember the eyes widening in fear, the pleading, the screaming. Robert pulled himself back. He told himself, 'Focus.'

The movie ended, and he suggested that they head upstairs and see about getting a room set up for her. She agreed. The two climbed the stairs, and he showed her into the master bedroom. He watched her stare at the bed he'd covered with a plastic paint cover and an old sheet and take a step back. He blocked the door and pulled out his knife, the one he always killed with, and grinned. He watched the realization hit her. The fear set in.

"Robert! Oh, God! What are you- No. No!"

He laughed as she continued to plead. Like any predator he circled his prey. He corralled her. He



saw what he had longed to see in her eyes since the first time he saw them, fear. "Don't do this. Please don't do this. I'll scream. People will hear."

"My nearest neighbors are old couples with hearing problems. It does no good to scream, but I love it when they do."

"I'll do anything. Anything!"

Robert grabbed her and touched the knife between her breasts but didn't push it in. He forced her back onto the bed. She stopped pleading and stared at him for a moment.

"If you do this to me I swear you will regret it. The wicked always have to pay. I trusted you. I loved you." Despite her fear, Amy glared at him. This wasn't the gentle girl, but a strong woman. A woman he was about to break.

"I doubt it." Robert laughed as he gripped her and began to use the knife. The real screams started.

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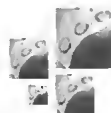
Robert smiled at the memory of that triumph as he pulled his car as far into the woods as it would go. He carefully set up a tent in case anyone should wander upon his car. Only then, after checking around, did he grab the body from the trunk and begin the hike to his personal burial spot.

Sweaty, exhausted, yet unscratched because of his carefully chosen clothing, Robert reached the small clearing with eleven unmarked graves. He dropped Amy's body, grabbed the shovel from its hiding place, and began to dig Amy's grave.

After the job was finished, Robert walked back to his car still reliving Amy's screams. He smiled at the memory, packed up his tent, and started home. He walked into the kitchen. There on the table sat the knife covered in blood.

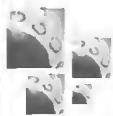
Robert stared at it. 'How did it get back in here? I buried that thing.' This time, he took the knife and locked it in the old safe in the attic crawlspace. Then, he went to go take a nap. Killings always tired him. When he entered the bedroom, he found the knife sitting on the bed in a pool of blood that shouldn't have been there. He cleaned it up before he left to bury Amy.

Robert ran from the room. Amy's threat rang in his ear. "The wicked ones always have to pay." He moved to the spare bedroom. The knife sat on the bed. Robert froze. The knife moved off the bed and hovered in the air. He dashed down the stairs. Somehow the knife was always behind him as he ran and in front of him when he entered a room. The living room. The kitchen. The basement. His brown eyes were wide with fear. His breathing was fast and hard. Robert heard Amy's voice laughing. Now he was the prey.



The knife blocked his way to every window. Every door to the outside would not unlock. The knife corralled him up the stairs into his bedroom, onto his bed. The last thing he heard was Amy's voice emanating from every corner of the room. "The wicked ones have to pay."

About a week later, Robert was found with the knife sticking out of his back in the last of many stab wounds, next to six letters written in blood. KILLER.



## WHERE I FELT SAFE AS A CHILD

### JOEL ARREGUIN

I used to live across from St. Catherine's Hospital emergency room. I shared a bedroom with my brother Hugo and at one point we had the only elm tree on our block. Every time Dad would pick us up from school, we would have a visitor when we arrived on our driveway. One of us would find a dead squirrel at the stump of our elm tree.

The tree was colossal, branchy, and its leaves bushed over the electrical lines. For nine afternoons, the three of us would find a dead squirrel curled into a fetal position—dead. Our squirrels were grey from the mills—they were now burnt like used up charcoal. Grilled squirrels, we would stare at them Dad would scoop them up with a shovel, dump them in the garbage can, and we would say phrases like, 'better luck next time nutty buddy' or "he must have been nuts."

Our tree ended up being a personal memorial until we had to cut it down because East Chicago asked us to. At least they paid for it. No more fun—which meant now I was going to be the celebrity of attention. I was in first grade and I had just finished my first grading period in a new school; I went to preschool at St. Paul Lutheran. This meant—first report card. It came through our mail and Dad was in for a surprise.

I remember every time my brother or I got into school trouble, the other would laugh his ass off, but I was taught a lesson later for instigating or what my dad would phrase being a buttinsky. Sometimes we would hide from Dad when we sunk through thin ice to find ourselves in deep shit.

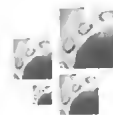
I remember when I was six years old and hiding from getting a deserved spanking. When Dad was angry he threatened us with his belt. His uneven mustache would flare up and down as if his under nose hair could breathe on its own. A spanking was worse than having to say sorry for something that you weren't sorry for or standing in a corner for an hour and missing your cartoons, or having your mouth washed out with soap. The belt was the electric chair because I knew that sitting after the swats would leave burning sores on my butt. Luckily, I had several hiding places to consider.

I could tiptoe down stairs and slip into the boiler room, OH NO, there might be spiders down there! Hmm, how about under my covers? Yeah—I might as well get Dad's belt for him and polish my own ass. The closet, Dad will never know which one—

"JOEL AARON ARREGUIN," he shouts.

Ahhh...he's coming!

I ran into my side of the closet. I slid the door shut and buried myself under a pile of dirty



clothes. I heard the bedroom door open—

My dad asks, “Hugo, do you know where your brother is?”

I can’t hear Hugo answer.

Don’t open the door, don’t open the door, please don’t open the door, I have to pee, don’t open the door, I pray to Jesus with underwear on my head.

My Dad walks in front of the closet and calmly commands, “Joel Aaron, get out here now.” He struggles to slide the closet door open because of a Mickey Mouse t-shirt caught under its rails.

I stand up contemplating, how did he figure me out so quickly? Hugo...you butthead! He must have seen me sneak in. Dad must have given him bazillion dollars as a bribe or something.

He forcibly slides the door quickly; I flinch with my poor bright-clothed camouflage, and release a girly yelp.

Dad holds in his left hand a piece of what looks like wax paper with maroon type on it and asks curiously, “Why do you have an F on your report card?”

I stand up slowly taking hole-socks off my shoulders and the Batman undies off my head.

“Joel Aaron, answer me or you’re gonna get it,” Dad threatens with a wave of his right hand.

Hugo imitates an angel but smiles like the Grinch.

“I don’t know; my teacher doesn’t like me,” I scrounge for an excuse.

Dad asks, “Why did you receive an F in Mathematics?”

Hugo mumbles, “Because he’s a dummy.”

“You’re next Hugo, you buttinsky,” Dad says to him while focusing on me, “Your ass is mine.” He gestures me to step out of the closet.

“Daddy, I have to go to the bathroom,” I said bravely with a red sock clenched in my hand.

“Go, I’ll be here when you get out. Don’t make me come in there, boy,” he threatens with glistering hawk eyes preying a mouse.

I turn around, close the door, and hear my Dad order Hugo to clean the closet. Eww, those were his clothes on me.

I start to cry and pace back and forth in what seems like death row.

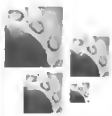
“Hurry up Joel Aaron,” Dad shouts a command just outside the bathroom door.

Time to face the executioner, buttinsky. I think to myself, how do you spell that? I flush nothing down, wash my hands with multiple chunks of soap sandwiched into one, and open the door with an idea.

I walk towards Dad and pee on myself.

He presses his hand against his forehead, “Aw f—”

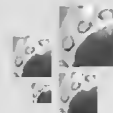




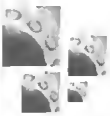
## THE BEST TYPE OF PROTECTION

KATIE GUERNSEY

The tree branch that scrapes the window,  
The noise that goes bump in the dark,  
The creak on the stairs  
on a cold dark night.  
The unknown is terrifying.  
Don't stick your hands or feet  
over the edge of the bed.  
You know something is down there.  
Something will get you.  
Another scrape,  
Another bump,  
Another creak.  
There's only one thing  
that can save you now.  
Pull the blankets over your head.  
Nothing can get you.  
Now you're safe.  
Hiding under the blankets  
is the best type of protection.



# SCHOLAR



## SCHOLARS

RANDEE PORTTEUS

We sit in class  
but don't belong.

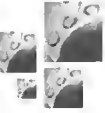
We write the lyrics  
of our favorite songs

in our notebooks  
(littered with notes –

from our friends  
about books, boys and hopes).

We stare out the window  
Our thoughts far away

trying to stay awake  
and waiting for Friday.



# EARLY MORNINGS AND LATE NIGHTS

## TED SPURGETIS

It keeps my body going.  
Muscles and tendons.  
Caffeine and sugar.  
It keeps my brain thinking.  
Muscles and nerves.  
Experiences and memories.  
Life is like coffee.



## A PRUFROCK STATEMENT TED SPURGETIS

Why is the question the hardest part?  
You can envision it perfect in your mind,  
yet you can't ever put it in action.  
It brews in your head.  
It weighs on your conscience.  
The energy you need for life  
becomes sublimated to stress.  
You can sit for tea.  
You can laugh at cards.  
You can enjoy a walk.  
But God forbid that you ever ask,  
that simple question on your tongue.  
Envision the time you have.  
Observe the moments pass by.  
Take note of wasted happiness,  
and honor your decision.  
Watch potential gone by.  
Speculate the consequences.  
Look for your mistakes,  
and maintain that you were right.  
You were right not to ask that question.  
You were right to drown alone.



## UNTITLED

### TORIANA BRISCOE

I watch my best friend periodically.  
She does crazy things when she thinks no one is watching.  
She stares at her feet talking about how much they didn't match.  
She barked like a dog out of the blue  
and scared me half to death: WOW!

She has a slight case of OCD,  
Because she has to touch her door knob 3 times.  
I really love my best friend  
but I feel like she is a freak.  
When we walk to dance practice together she likes to act like she's blind.  
She says "Lead me to practice Bri,"  
and I say "Get out of my face please."  
My best friend does some crazy things.  
I believe she is a Creep.



## MY ROOMY

SETH ARTHUR

He is one crazy son of a bitch.  
He makes up words that don't exist  
Drinks too much vodka and pukes in his shoes.  
Uses his textbooks as drink coasters.  
Always responds with "That's what she said."

He is one crazy son of a bitch.  
Laughs at me when I suggest studying.  
Prank calls info commercial numbers.  
Calls me bro...when clearly I'm not his brother.  
Changes his major more than his underwear.

He is everything you want in a roommate.  
One hell of a good time.

## FIGHTING ACADEMIA

IAN J. EVANS

Poems write themselves.  
That is the idea at least.  
Mine don't cooperate.



## THE STRUGGLES OF A POET

KATIE GUERNSEY

All concepts of time have gone.  
I sit here, staring  
at the blank screen.  
Nothing,  
except that blinking black line.  
Taunting me.  
“Write, write, write!” it says.  
But nothing.  
Nothing comes out.  
I try.  
I struggle.  
I'm not good enough.  
I'll never be good enough.  
But I'm going to keep trying.  
Maybe.

## MRS. FICKEN

ERIC KESSLER

I remember, back to my high school freshman year, when I was in gym,  
Mrs. Ficken, the diving coach, had laps for us to swim.  
We learned how to dive and how to inflate our shirt.  
I can still remember going off the diving board,  
Doing a back flop and how much it hurt.





# INSOMNIA

IAN J. EVANS

Night creeps up quickly;  
Minutes pass faster than thought.  
Two, three, four, no sleep.

# FUTILITY

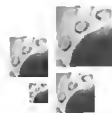
TED SPURGETIS

I wearily set  
my glasses down  
on the desk

and rub my  
eyes with  
special vigor

tired of reading  
this text for  
some class

tired of reading  
with no  
comprehension



## ROLLERCOASTER LIFE

SAMANTHA HARKNESS

Up, down, back, and forth.  
Side to side and upside down  
Eyes closed, holding tight.

## PLAYING IN JAZZ BAND

ERIC KESSLER

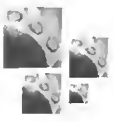
The jazz band plays loud,  
the trombones sounding brassy,  
playing glissandoes.



MUG  
CARLA LUZADDER



# EDIBLES



# BAT MAN

## ANNA ROHALY

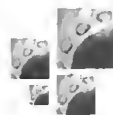
I find I have an unusual hunger these days for bats. Stranded and alone, trapped on an island in the middle of the Pacific, I lived in a cave surrounded by the little creatures. When the turf was too rough to catch fish, I was often forced to hunt my little winged roommates. During the day they simply clung to the top of our short cave. I could catch the little bats by stunning them with light and then just plucking them off of the wall. After taking them down I would kill them, then tear their wings off and cook them over my fire for dinner. When I ate them then, I always found them leathery and chewy but now I am craving them. I will just have to go for a late afternoon walk and see if I can find any.

Leaving my house, I wander down the cement streets and past the pastel colored houses. It seems strange after living alone on that island for almost eight years to come back and see that people do exist. I know that my neighbors think I am strange. I don't like talking to people. On the island I talked and no one replied and I fell out of the rhythm of conversations. My therapist wants me to help organize a block party. I on the other hand want to forget about the block party and live alone again, so you can see that we have different ideas of how my therapy should be going.

The houses are beginning to spread out now and there are more trees and grass between them. I wish I had lived out in the country before leaving for that fishing trip. I could have returned and lived in isolation instead of in my house surrounded by noisy people. There are moments when I almost succumb to the noise, where I almost enjoy it again. On the island there were times that the absence of people's voices and noises grew so overwhelming that I would scream for hours and, covering my ears, would lie curled up in a ball on the sand. I feel torn between two worlds now.

I see an abandoned house sitting back in the woods away from the road. Ivy grows up the walls, covers the chimney, and in some places grows over the clouded windows. I hear a small screeching sound that is more familiar than any person's voice. The cry of a bat is hard to mistake for a voice and though people think I am insane, I find the sound comforting.

I veer off of the road towards this source of comfort. Moss softens my footsteps and covers the small path that used to be a driveway. Reaching the house, I cross the rotting wooden porch, passing old rusting lawn chairs and a red wagon. A No Trespassing sign hangs in the window but I walk past it, ignoring the orange and black, the little letters next to the door spelling out Robertson. I pull the door open. The lock has been unturned for so long that between the rotten door frame and the rusting bolt one small tug was all it took for the door to swing out on its hinges. I walk into the old home.



It used to be lovely and in a very different way it still is. The tiled floors inside were protected from the rain and so they remain sturdy even though they are covered with dust and bat feces. The family had moved out in a hurry. Furniture is still in the rooms, some of it toppled over, some of it covered in cobwebbed sheets. I walk into the kitchen and find a wood stove, a white and red metal table, and an old fashion sink. The stained glass window over the sink is a dusty, muted green and gold. I turn the handle on the sink and watch as well water gushes out a brownish green from the faucet.

The bats cry from somewhere else in the house. Leaving the kitchen, I cross the floor and walk into the living room. The couch is toppled backwards and a mouse peeks out at me from under the stripped cushions. I walk over to the chimney where the bat screeches are coming from. There are even pictures left behind on the mantel. An old woman smiling and holding two little kids, a beautiful young woman holding an infant, and man standing next to that young woman at the alter. Everyone smiling, everyone happy. What had happened?

I may not know what happened here but in this house I can see my own life mirrored back in its empty solitude. I can almost swear that it is my own face staring back at me from those pictures. Some tragedy had struck this lovely family in this little home, a tragedy so terrible that they had been driven away by the force of those memories. Perhaps one of the children had died and they had moved away to escape all reminders of her. The young woman may have been diagnosed with cancer and the family had payed for her treatments until they had lost everything, including her. Maybe the father's company had been accused of fraud and they had been left with no money after the court battles. Or maybe he too had been washed away at sea during a fishing expedition and instead of swimming to an island had been lost among the waves. What ever had happened, I felt tied to this house somehow, as though the house had been abandoned and isolated just as I had been.

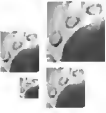
Tearing my eyes away from the pictures, I move the fire poker and shovel away from the wall and sit down next to the fireplace. Putting my head in my hands I allow the overwhelming feelings I've been shoving down to come out in long sobs as I listen to the soft calls of the bats. Every emotion, every second of overwhelming presence crashes down on me so that when I leave the house later with only one bat in a bag, I can barely walk. Somehow though, through feeling an actual pain again, I feel somehow relieved and reassured that I am still human.

After that first trip to the abandoned house, I began to go more frequently. Each time after that, I took some cleaning supplies with me. I swept, mopped, and replaced the rotting wood. I sanded and fixed the plumbing so that the water ran clear. Weeds were pulled, the ivy was trimmed, and paint was bought for the trim work. The better the house the began to look, the less abandoned, the better I began to feel. The one change that I did not make however, was to chase out the bats. I let them continue living



in the chimney. They always did make good roommates, especially when I could not face the crowds at the grocery store.

A month after I was done with the major renovations and fixings within the house, I went to the bank and bought the home for the price they had set after first evaluating the building. I convinced them not to go out for a second look. Driving my car back to the little house alone in the woods, I noticed one last change I needed to make. I went out to the edge of the road and put out a mailbox. My name, Tom Roberts, is engraved on the side. Like a life raft, the mailbox secures me to humanity while at the same time the house will keep me from their insanity. After placing the mailbox down near the road I headed towards the house and felt myself smile a real smile for the first time since I was brought home. People still think I'm crazy, but I rather like my new home. Here, I have found my place in the world, a place with solitude and company, a place with ivy and bats.

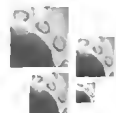


# HOW TO OPEN A JAR OF PEACHES

## RANDEE PORTEUS

I have a craving for fruit.  
Lucky me – there’s a jar of peaches in my fridge.  
Only one thing is keeping me from them:  
That damn lid.  
I twist and I twist and I twist.  
I grunt and groan  
And contort my body into weird positions.  
I scream.  
Fuck you, jar, fuck you.  
I beat it against my dresser.  
I run it under hot water.  
I tap a knife against the lid.  
I cry a little.  
I just want some peaches.  
I enlist the help of my friend.  
She makes a funny face,  
And with a little “oof!”  
The lid pops off.  
I’m not hungry anymore.

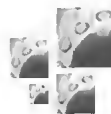




## A HOLE IN THE HAIR NET

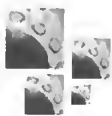
KATIE GUERNSEY

A bite of macaroni  
Is more than it seems.  
At our cafeteria,  
It's the stuff of dreams.  
Until that one fateful day  
When my life changed forever.  
When I pulled a long gray hair  
Out of that cheesy splendor.  
Gagging and choking  
I took it to the kitchen.  
It was then that I noticed  
Who was serving the chicken.  
"May I help you?" she barked.  
I stood frozen in terror.  
For under that netted cap  
I found that hair's bearer.  
A scowl on her face  
Sweat on her brow,  
I knew I'd be bringing my lunch  
From then on out.



## MIXING MEALS TED SPURGETIS

Tiles, like white porcelain.  
Brown counters ring the small room.  
A common occupant  
wanders in on four paws,  
on an uncommon agenda.  
The cat leaps onto the counter,  
a green treasure secured in its mouth.  
Sharp sizzling and potent smell  
emanate from a black pan.  
Not to be intimidated,  
the cat mixes a grasshopper  
into human-made stew.  
A shriek and a scuffle  
send the cat flying from counter  
as the kitchen mistress enters.  
Curses drift after the cat  
as well as the sound of a wooden spoon,  
slapping where the cat had just been.  
The strong woman fishes out  
the cat's gracious addition.



# HEALTHY LUNCH

IAN J. EVANS

Can someone make my simple wish come true?  
Male athlete in search of a healthy lunch.  
Are you in Rensselaer? Or somewhere new?

A turkey sandwich with cheese that's bleu,  
A peach, a pear or grapes in a bunch,  
can someone make my simple wish come true?

Beef and potatoes in a simmering stew –  
perhaps some carrots and peas for crunch.  
Are you in Rensselaer? Or somewhere new?

Barbecued pork ribs with no fat or sinew –  
Sweet Baby Ray's sauce and spiked red punch.  
Can someone make my simple wish come true?

Or maybe I'll just have some toast and a brew,  
This choice can't be wrong, I've got a hunch.  
Are you in Rensselaer? Or somewhere new?

If you'd like to help, let the cooking ensue,  
with luck you can also help me make brunch.  
Can someone make my simple wish come true?  
Are you in Rensselaer? Or somewhere new?



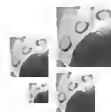
# BEAUTY



# SERENITY

IAN J. EVANS

I sat there, cooking;  
Hot, sulfurous water bubbled around my neck,  
I scanned the night sky.  
No moon; thousands of stars.  
I felt insignificant.  
I sat there; listening, looking, feeling,  
And became calmed, assured.  
Out of sweltering water, the breeze cools me.  
The stars gave the ravine a serene glow.  
The creek bubbled and cooed, adding to the peacefulness.  
I smiled and slid back into the simmering pool.  
It was a good night.



# MOM'S NECKLACE

## SETH ARTHUR

My mother slowly opens her wooden jewelry box.  
I stand behind her looking up at her reflection in the large bathroom mirror.  
She grasps the golden necklace from the box and gently places it around her neck.  
Small rays of light bounce off the necklace and make spots of brightness dance under her chin.  
She smiles as she clasps it on.  
She loves the way it looks on her.  
It gives her confidence, sophistication, grace.  
She notices me in the mirror and giggles, "Good morning, honey."  
"Good morning mom." I reply.  
She rubs her fingers against the golden necklace, "Today's going to be a great day."



# SILVER SPOON

## ANNA ROHALY

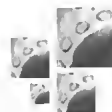
I am sitting in a sandbox with my baby cousin. All but a cornerstone is gone of that little white farm house. For over a decade, my grandfather Bill has promised us grandchildren a quarter for each piece of glass we find in the yard and throw in the trash can for him. The farm looks tremendously different. The house has been replaced by a mobile home, the woods are taller, and my great-grandparents no longer sit on the lawn and enjoy the family. Instead they lie beneath the ground resting in peaceful death. Yes, a lot has changed.

I dig my hands into the sandbox. Pamela and I are building a sandcastle. She is building the towers, I am digging the moat. As my hand slips through the finely ground stone, I hit something smooth and straight. I veer the moat to find the end of my new found treasure. Through the warm sand I see a peek of blue gray. Metal. Pushing more sand aside, I find a silver spoon, tarnished and worn from years underground.

The silver spoon once belonged to my great grandmother Julia. It had sat in the drawer of her ever bustling and warm kitchen, reflecting her image each time she pulled out the shining silverware for dinner. As Julia grew older, she and her husband Joe spent less time at the farm house, opting instead to spend their time in the city where neighbors were close by. The silver soup spoon was only taken out and eaten with when the whole family gathered on the farm for a cookout or when the white haired Hungarian couple sat down to a quiet dinner before a long drive back to the city. Because Julia and Joe preferred life in Chicago to life on the farm, they both missed out on one of the most exciting days on the farm. The silver spoon was there for it all.

On June 19, 1991 no one was on the farm. The sky outside the little windows, trimmed with black, was swirling gray and stormy. The rain came down in gentle waves at first but soon grew into sheets of water pummeling the small trees that covered the farm's overgrown ground. Lightning split the sky from end to end and the thunder rattled the loose metal latch on the screen door. Out on the porch, the wood was slick from rain and the noise was almost deafening as the water drummed on the roof and broke through the screen to ping against the metal cans of gasoline sitting by the wall. The lightning struck in the distance. The storm was not even close yet.

The trees that grew on the old fence row were taller than the others and as the wind hurtled through they bent and shuddered. The ferocity of the rain and wind snapped branches which fell to the ground, edges sharp and bleeding out sap. Mixing with the rain, the sap fell to the ground unnoticed. The



lightning struck again, closer.

Through the eaves of the little house, the wind moaned. The lilac bushes, preparing to blossom around the house, shook. They scrapped against the closed windows which from the inside of the house looked like stained glass under the streaming rain. Everything inside sat as if holding its breath, waiting for the storm to pass, waiting for the silence. Instead another bolt of lightning crackled, right outside.

This bolt of lightning was not just splitting the sky, it was splitting a tree in the fence line. The tree, a once strong and powerful oak, splintered and lost one of its largest branches. The branch fell from the tree, twisting through the air until it met not the ground, but the power line which ran up to Julia's little farm house. Meeting the line, there was a moments pause in the decent of the branch. It was like the calm before a storm. The calm ended with a hiss as the wire pulled loose from the pole attached to the little farm house. The branch plummeted straight down to earth and the wire followed, spraying a shower of sparks. The wire caught on the roof of the porch.

The sparks continued to pour from the wire and as they met the rain, they sizzled and steamed. Within minutes, the roof was flickering with flames. The rain continued and smoke rose in thick clouds as the fire began to dance across and through the roof, eating any dry wood, shingles, and insulation it could find through the sodden surface. A beam of wood cracked under the attack of the fire and fell to the slick porch below. The heat of the fire fell with it and caught onto the dry wooden rockers, the small stand that held Joe's cigars and Julia's cup of coffee. It snaked across the floor and licked wickedly at the base of the tin cans which lined the wall.

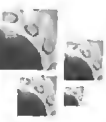
Had the house been alive, like in ghostly stories of haunted buildings, the little house would have screamed. But the little house, filled with Julia's crochet afghans, her silver spoons, and her happy memories, sat silently as the tins of gasoline ignited.

The explosion ripped through Julia and Joe's little white farm house, trimmed in black, twisting the grand-kids' metal bunk beds, shattering the glass in the windows, and destroying their once happy home. Glass from bottles, jars, plates, and cups flew like bullets from the house, landing in the woods over one hundred yards away. The silver spoon hit a wall, burst through the shattering house, landed twenty yards away.

If the neighbors down the road had thought the thunder was loud, the explosion deafened them. Through the woods they could see the fireball, consuming the splintered structure of Julia and Joe's house. They called 911, but it was too late. The house was gone, all those memories, gone.

Standing up from my seat in the sandbox, I wipe the gritty sand from the spoon's handle. It was once badly bent, as though a shovel had been sent through the dirt and hit the stem of the spoon, bending it nearly in half. I bend it back into shape. There is still a kink in the metal, but it is as spoon-like as





it might once have been, sitting snugly in a drawer in my grandmother's ever bustling and warm little kitchen. No longer shiny, it still reflects her love of that kitchen, of that house where she survived the Great Depression, where she raised her children, and fed her husband dinner each night. Maybe he once ate off of this same silver spoon. Either way, the house is gone. However, maybe the memories have not yet turned to ash. Maybe they just need to be dug up.

The idea comes quickly. I abandon the sand box and my cousin and head for the mobile home. I cross the big wooden porch to the screen door and let it slam shut behind me. Turning left I head across the ugly blue shag carpeting to the first bedroom and, entering, open the closet door.

My younger brother is in an amazing Boy Scout troop and after selling an ungodly amount of popcorn for the troop, he was awarded a metal detector. It is now in the closet of this small room, kept company only by an osculating fan and bunk beds. I open the box.

I pull out the long, narrow piece of equipment. Holding the handle, I turn on the small screen that sticks away from the base of the pole that attaches the handle to the circular piece at the bottom. I have never used this before but figure it can not be too hard to figure out. I drag it out to the dining room and lie it on the shag carpeting.

Crossing to the other side of the room, I open a small wooden cupboard and pull out some small flags that look like the ones used to mark buried gas mains or electrical lines. These will be my markers for anything I find. Picking up the metal detector, I head out to the remains of the old barn.

The old barn had stood about seventy yards from the house. Long before the house was blown to bits, the barn started to lean. Julia was so nervous about the leaning walls and her grandchildren playing in the building, that she pestered Joe to tear it down. They burned it to the ground and now only the stone foundation remains, half buried in sandy earth.

I turn on the metal detector and begin to sweep it across the ground, hitting the stems of the small yellow flowers, which makes a swishing noise. The noise is mingled with the static and occasional beeping of the metal detector. It is a noisy process. Soon my mom and aunt wander over, carrying little Pamela who had gotten sick of the sand box. They watch as I sweep the corners of the old barn. The beeping of the detector picks up and turns into a solid beep when I get about three feet from the corner. I mark the spot with a flag and keep moving. Another solid tone. Another flag. Within a short time, I have nearly a dozen flags planted.

Turning off the metal detector, I go to find a shovel and a bucket. My aunt and mom disappear and come back with my dad and uncle, who arrive with more shovels. Together, we all begin to take turns to dig up the buried treasures of the farm. The memories. I find a horse shoe from Old Nelly, Joe's plow horse, I find a plowshare. Dad finds the end of a hoe and a hammer head. Uncle Kevin digs up a



screw driver and some nails. All of these objects are put in the bucket. Mom and Aunt Linda take them into the mobile home and wash them off.

An hour later, when we are done shifting sand, we call my grandfather, Bill. I call him Opa. Opa listens to the list of items we have found. Each one conjures up a memory from the way the farm used to be. The time Julia had hacked off the head of a snake that had entered her garden with the metal hoe. The time he and Joe had climbed to the roof of the barn to fix some leaks and watched as a wall of rain covered the hot sunny day. Helping his father plow the fields and plant the acres of crops. The chores he had done, the jobs he had worked. All the memories came back, were shared, savored. We had literally dug up the memories of this place and hearing them come spilling from my Opa, showed me that I had been right. The memories were still here even if they were buried.



# CAT LADY

## SAMANTHA SCHROEDER

Big yellow eyes,  
patches of black, caramel, white.  
She's a funny cat, always jumping,  
purring, rolling around.  
We found her in our drive way,  
fed her, and she stayed.  
Mom calls her Pumpkin Muffy,  
brother calls her Sparky,  
dad called her a nuisance,  
friends call her Porch Cat.  
She's my Baby girl.  
At my side every night,  
clawing at my door in the morning.  
Twitchy tail, soft ears.  
She runs to me, meowing,  
whenever I come back to visit.  
My cat is my world.



## SNOWFLAKES

MARGARET ENGELHART

No one snowflake is the same,  
Falling slowly to the ground with grace.  
Every snowflake is different, unique;  
The world would be boring  
If the snowflakes were the same.

## ODE TO STEPHEN COLBERT

ELYSSE HILLYER

O Stephen! Patriot most bold!  
You don't see race or color,  
The messages you send will never grow old.  
America is great, and strong is the dollar  
Without you, I would not get my news.  
The Threatdown tells me what to fear,  
and only the deserving get the Colbert Bump.  
Bud Light Lime is your choice of booze,  
and when your voice reaches my ear,  
I chant USA with a might fist pump.



RATTLE  
KYLIE GUNDER

# WE ASURE

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